

Funeral for a Bear

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Colorado Connections
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Photo by DFG Staff

I'm so proud of my neighbors! They didn't panic. They didn't over react. And the bear didn't get hurt. Instead they all responded calmly and appropriately and our bear found his way back to a wilder place, unharmed. But last year was a different story.

Last year a different bear visited our neighborhood and people reacted badly. A flurry of calls to the Division of Wildlife from panicked homeowners resulted in the bear being destroyed.

Why did the two incidents result in such radically different outcomes? The key is in understanding the bear.

When people come to me and say, "I saw a bear! What should I do?" They are always surprised at my response. They expect me to say something like, "Oh my gosh! Call the Division of Wildlife, that bear must be removed!" But instead, I respond by saying, "Wow, that is really cool! Go home, get out your journal, and remember every detail of the experience. Most people will never have the

pleasure of seeing a wild bear. You are so lucky!"

Our response to bears has everything to do with the outcome of the experience. Last year the response in my neighborhood was all negative. The bear was the problem and the only solution was to get rid of the bear. This year the bear was the issue and the solution was to inform the neighbors and get rid of all the temptations that will get him into trouble.

As soon as the bear was spotted (tearing apart a bird feeder), the community reacted. We put up signs at the entrances telling people about the bear and instructing them to...

- ✓ Keep their garbage indoors (even the night before garbage day)
- ✓ Take down all bird feeders (especially at night).
- ✓ Clean BBQ grills and store them in the garage.
- ✓ Keep dog and cat food indoors.

Brochures went out explaining how to live in bear country. As a result, people were educated and their response to the bear was calm and reasonable. The bear was a topic of fascination rather than one of fear. When he finally went on his way, you could almost detect an air of disappointment rather than relief.

Last year we killed a bear in my neighborhood because we didn't understand him. This year we celebrate. For two weeks in June, we had a bear share our lives. It was exciting and a little bit scary. But everyone who saw it is richer for the experience.